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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GOJ SPOKESMAN PUBLICLY DENIES PRESS REPORTS ON
MILITARY PREPARATIONS FOR WAR WITH IRAQ

REF: FBIS GMP20030202000049

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (U) A GOJ spokesman January 30 strenuously and publicly denied recent press reports asserting that Jordan had agreed to allow U.S. troops to be stationed in the Kingdom and to allow overflights of U.S. military aircraft in the event of war with Iraq. Minister of Information and government spokesman Mohammed Adwan told the official Petra News Agency that such reports (alluding to but not specifying a January 30 article in the Washington Post) were "totally untrue and baseless. Jordan's stand on this matter is firm and clear: Jordan has repeatedly stressed it will not participate in any war in any way, and it will not allow any party -- neither the U.S. nor Iraq -- to use its soil and airspace." In the same interview Adwan also rebutted a separate Al-Jazeera TV news report that claimed that Iraq had ceased oil deliveries to the Kingdom.

2. (U) Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb echoed Adwan's statements a day later on January 31 when, in the local Arabic language daily Ad-Dustour, he denied that Jordan had agreed to provide the U.S. with any facilities to assist in a war with Iraq. Additionally, on February 2, an unnamed "high-level Jordanian official" described a February 1 Daily Telegraph story asserting that British SAS and U.S. Delta Force troops had launched a mission from Jordan as "sheer baseless press speculation" in an interview with London's al-Hayah (ref). Interestingly, these denials also come amidst articles in the local press reporting the delivery of the first six planes of a new squadron of F-16 aircraft from the U.S. and the GOJ's request for deployment of U.S. Patriot missile batteries to protect populated areas of the kingdom.

3. (U) The English language Jordan Times in a January 31 editorial summed up and sought to synthesize this information: "Expectations should be realistic. Jordan can warn -- and His Majesty King Abdullah indeed has repeatedly warned -- against the disastrous consequences of a new military attack . . . But Jordan cannot stop the war. The government's duty is first and foremost toward the safety and security of the country and its citizens. A weak Jordan would be no good either to the Palestinians or Iraqis, or any other Arab people . . . These are times for maturity and good judgment, not for emotional reactions. As common wisdom goes, Jordan must hope for the best and prepare for the worst."

Comment

4. (C) The GOJ continues to press forward with a public relations strategy that seeks to reconcile the perceived gap between the Jordanian public's strong emotional opposition to a possible war with Iraq and the GOJ's own preparations should military action commence. Stressing the longstanding nature of the U.S.-Jordanian relationship, and particularly the defensive aspects of such things as deployment of Patriots and delivery of F-16s, is the best -- and possibly only -- way to square this circle.
GNEHM